

CHAPTER III.

THE KOOKA OUTBREAK IN 1872.

‘ IN 1863, at Sir Robert Montgomery’s request, I took the office of Secretary to Government during the absence to England of Mr. Davies for six months, and during that time the first signs of the rising of the Kooka sect were observed ; and I became alive to the extreme danger from the preaching of the head of the sect, Ram Singh, who was originally a carpenter and in himself a thoroughly religious character, but his followers gave a political turn to his tenets, and it was necessary to repress them. Sir Robert Montgomery issued stringent orders restraining the teachers from going about, propagating their dangerous doctrines, and so long as these rules were adhered to the danger anticipated was averted.

‘ In 1868, Sir Donald Macleod, who succeeded Sir Robert Montgomery, relaxed the prohibitions

placed on the sect, and immediately there was an enormous gathering of Kookas at the great Fair of Anundpore, near Khawal, in the Jullundur division, of which I was the Commissioner, and a disturbance very nearly broke out and would have done so had it not been for the exertions of the police. From that time forward the mischief began to spread, and murders in Umritzur, Ferozepore, and Loodiana were reported and traced to the influence of this sect.

'In January, 1872, I was in the camp of exercise at Delhi, by order of the Lieutenant-Governor, when the news came of an outbreak at Malair Kotla, and matters looked serious. Lord Napier of Magdala, Commander-in-Chief, was in the camp, and having been told that the disaffection, spread by Ram Singh's doctrines, had entered into the ranks of the native army, unless this insurrection was immediately stamped out, he feared the worst results. He, therefore, determined to send a small force of cavalry, infantry, and artillery to Loodiana, and I was ordered by the Lieutenant-Governor to proceed at once to the spot and prepare to suppress the insurrection.

'I asked for specific orders to apprehend the leader, Ram Singh, but I could get nothing definite out of the Lieutenant-Governor and was obliged

to leave without. I distinctly remember my last words to him, which were these: "Then I shall act on my own judgment, and you must support me." I lay special stress on *this*, and repeat it most emphatically now, because some time after, when the conduct of every one connected with the business was seriously criticized, the responsibility of the Lieutenant-Governor was denied in the matter.

'When I got to Loodiana I found that Cowan, Deputy Commissioner of that place, had energetically followed up the fanatics and had caught a large number of them at Malair Kotla. As Commissioner and superintendent of the native states, I had the power of life and death which he had not. I wrote to him from Loodiana, ordering him to try the rebels but not to put any sentence into execution until I joined him. But Cowan took the law into his own hands, and put my letter into his pocket, refusing to act on it, and had the men put to death. As soon as I heard of this I was placed in this awkward predicament. I knew that the crisis was most important. If I repudiated his action and showed that there was a division amongst rulers, the natives would have taken advantage of it, and as reports were hourly coming in of further dis-

turbances threatening in Jullundur and Amritsir, promptitude and action united was absolutely necessary. I recollected how, at the outbreak of the Mutiny, the prompt execution of a Sikh at Umballa had checked a threatened rising of the nation. I therefore decided to take upon myself the responsibility of Cowan's act. I wrote a letter approving of what he had done under the circumstances. An incorrect version of my letter was put forward representing my having given a more hearty approbation than was the case, and this operated most injuriously on the public mind. It was not till months after, when I had been removed from my post and subjected to all the heaviest displeasure of the Government (unjustly as I shall show), that I was able to publish the correct version of my letter to Mr. Cowan.

'To continue, however, my narrative of events, I rode out to Malair Kotla and found a number of men who had been caught red-handed in the murder of the inoffensive inhabitants. These I put on their trial before assessors consisting of the Vakheels of the native states, and having found them legally guilty, I sentenced them to death. In all this I acted perfectly within my powers, and even my worst enemies could take no exception to my proceedings, though many,

wise after the event, pronounced the sentences too severe.

‘My next step was to apprehend Ram Singh ; this had to be done very carefully to avoid any chance of rescue. I sent for him to come to my office at night, and ordered a special train to be in readiness. I had a guard concealed outside, to whom I handed him over as soon as he arrived, and put him into the train and sent him down to Delhi. I telegraphed to the Lieutenant-Governor, telling him what I had done. He approved of my act and obtained Lord Mayo's orders to send Ram Singh on to Calcutta, and subsequently to Rangoon where he died.

‘It is a very remarkable fact that up to the time of the publication of a most severe and unjust sentence on me, I was never told that there was any inquiry going on regarding my share in the transaction, and I was not called upon to make any defence. I had no sort of suspicion of the storm which suddenly burst on my head, the first intimation of which was a curt telegram from the Lieutenant-Governor removing me from my appointment.

‘Just at this time, fortunately for me, Lord Northbrook came out as Governor-General. I had applied to the Lieutenant-Governor for a copy

of the proceedings which led to my sentence of removal, but it was refused. I then appealed to Lord Northbrook, whose sense of justice operated in my favour, for I found that every letter or report which told in my favour had been carefully eliminated from the correspondence sent home for publication, and for the subsequent production of these I was indebted to Lord Northbrook's justice.

' It is a singular fact that whereas I believe the action of the Government was, as I was told, in a great measure prompted by a fear of the Exeter Hall party at home, I found to my great surprise and gratification the strongest support from that party, and I believe the missionaries to a man were on my side. The independent rajahs, native chiefs, and gentry generally, spontaneously advocated my cause,* and were promptly snubbed for doing so.

* From H. H. the MAHARAJAH of Puttiala, to the SECRETARY, Government, Punjab.

' February 15, 1872.

' MY DEAR FRIEND,—In reply to a telegram from you, I promised in my letter of the 20th ultimo, to make inquiries, as requested by his Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, and communicate to you the real cause of the Kooka outbreak; I therefore write for his Honour's information that, from many proofs, it is quite certain that Ram Singh's real motive and ambition was bent, upon religious *pretext*, to reign and acquire dominion, and he deceitfully implanted this capricious notion

‘I had been removed from my appointment as Commissioner of Umballa and declared to be in-

in the minds of his ignorant and superstitious followers that their creed was to predominate, that everywhere the Government of the country would be very soon in their hands, and as they had the fullest belief of this absurdity, he never failed to excite their minds and keep them in agitation and earnest expectation to attain their object.

‘2. And as the number of his followers—full of blind bigotry and zeal—had now increased to enormity and vastness, he therefore had a sanguine hope of success, and excited them to view, with the utmost horror and hatred, the act of cow-killing.

‘3. In exciting this prejudice his motive was,—as under the religious pretext the *cartridge prejudice* subverted and put in commotion the whole of India in 1857,—that by means of this ignitable match he may rouse up and excite the feelings of the whole Hindoo community, including the chieftains, gentry, and the troops, to stand up and sympathize in support of a common cause of hatred against the rulers of the country, anticipating, with some reason, a result from the confusion which would follow, that in every class and grade of the community he would be held in respect and awe, and thus establish a powerful sway over them, of which he was long in earnest.

‘Had not this appalling punishment been inflicted so promptly and so well as was the case, and had not Ram Singh and his Soobahs been deported from the province, there was no hope of the disturbance being quelled soon, and, without doubt, there would have been an endless waste of money and life before tranquillity and confidence would have been restored. Had they had the most meagre success, the whole sect would have sprung up like fiends, who were all anxiously watching the result of this pantomimic attack.

‘The above is a brief result of my inquiries, which have been recorded after the most careful observation. There is *one thing more*, which I think it right to bring to your notice.

capable of serving in any political capacity. I went up to Simla and there pleaded for a fair trial, and in the end, although it was manifestly impossible to obtain the actual reversal of the solemn decision of the Government of India, the practical result was that within a year of the order, pronouncing me unworthy of political power, I was sent as Envoy to Kashgar, and invested with the powers of a Plenipotentiary.

‘ Looking back on the past, after a long lapse of years, I fully adhere to the decision which I hastily arrived at, at the time of the Kooka outbreak, to support my subordinate.

I have learnt from newspapers, etc., that the Government of India has expressed its disapprobation at the manner of the punishments awarded by the local authorities. I believe the object of Government will be misunderstood by the native public, and particularly by the benighted sect, who will, no doubt, attribute it to the supernatural power of their “Sutgooroo.”

‘ This will tend in a great measure to frustrate and invalidate the excellent action and efficient measures adopted in the coercion and eradication, by the district authorities and native chieftains, of an evil which had been so promptly and adequately nipped in the bud before bringing forth blossoms of further evil, and would make them look light and unimportant.

‘ I am of opinion that misconstruction of intention of a Government by the public is *always* fraught with unpleasant consequences, and I deem it right to inform you of the views I take on the subject.

‘ I am, my dear friend, yours very sincerely,

‘ (Signed) MOHENDRA SINGH, *Maharajah of Pultiala.*’

‘ That he acted improperly is a matter beyond question, and the Government were doubtless bound to visit him with displeasure, but the manner of their doing so was altogether improper.

‘ Some of them employed the press at home to support them, and to crush the unfortunate officials whom they had done their best to ruin.

‘ I am justified in saying this, because articles appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* simultaneously with the orders in the *Government Gazette* in India which could not have been inspired by any who were not either in the Council or intimately acquainted with their mind.

‘ Cowan, like a drowning man catching at a straw, and misinterpreting the support which I gave him, caused me additional trouble by giving an incorrect version of my letter already referred to. But I assumed it was unintentional, and subsequently I did my utmost to help him when he was turned out of the service by procuring a very good appointment for him in India.